

Contents

Introduction	ix
Landmarks in a Remarkable Life	xv
Engage Your Brain	1
Gates's Heroes	7
<i>Friend and Role Model</i>	11
Find Your True Calling	14
<i>The Birth of the Microcomputer Age</i>	19
Embrace Your Inner Geek	21
Keep an Eye on the Big Chance	28
Find Your Comrades-in-Arms	34
<i>Profile: Paul Allen</i>	36
<i>Profile: Steve Ballmer</i>	39
<i>Profiles: Charles Simonyi, Nathan Myhrvold and Kazuhiko Nishi</i>	42
Employ the Best	46
<i>Sleep is for Wimps</i>	49

Dare to Dream	52
<i>Microsoft's Big Deal</i>	57
Innovate, Innovate, Innovate	61
<i>Stress-Test Your Ideas</i>	67
Gates and Intellectual Property	70
Lead from the Front	76
Learn from Your Mistakes	82
<i>The Internet: The One That Nearly Got Away</i>	85
Keep Track of the Competition	89
<i>Microsoft vs. Apple</i>	93
Business is Business	101
<i>Microsoft and Monopolies</i>	108
Realize That No Man is an Island	115
<i>Profile: Melinda Gates</i>	120
Enjoy the Trappings of Your Success	126
<i>The Richest Man in the World</i>	132
Take Time to Reboot	136
Read Like Bill Gates	142
<i>Gates's Favourite Business Book</i>	150
Give Something Back	153
Redefining Philanthropy	159
<i>The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation</i>	164
Creative Capitalism	169
Bring Your Celebrity to Bear	174
Philanthropic Aims: Providing Education and Equality of Opportunity	180
Philanthropic Aims: Combating Disease	185

<i>The Fight Against Polio</i>	189
Gates and God	192
The Gates Legacy	196
Selected Bibliography	201

Find Your True Calling

'I was lucky enough, at a young age, to discover something that I loved and that fascinated me – and still fascinates me.'

BILL GATES IN *INDUSTRY WEEK*, 1996

In 1986, a feature in the *Wall Street Journal* painted a picture of Bill Gates's life as a Harvard student in terms that could apply to millions of other naval-gazing undergraduates facing up to impending adulthood. Gates described himself 'sitting in my room being a philosophical depressed guy, trying to figure out what I was doing with my life'.

Doubtless, this is a broadly accurate depiction, in that the exact path of his life was yet to be laid out. However, whereas many students literally have not a clue about what will come after their carefree university days draw to a close, Gates was all but destined to make his mark in the computing industry. After all, he spent swathes of his waking hours honing his programming skills and had done for years. When Gates first got serious with a computer, he was only thirteen, but very quickly it was evident that it was a relationship built on firm foundations. He had found his love and was intent on nurturing it.

How to Think Like Bill Gates

The ‘first date’ occurred around 1968 at Lakeside school, although it was something of a blind date. That is because Lakeside did not have a computer of its own. Such things were too large and much too expensive for a school to possess in those days. To own a mainframe computer – the cutting-edge machines of the time – you needed a budget of millions and acres of air-conditioned space in which the banks of equipment could be kept at a suitable temperature. Nonetheless, Lakeside did have a teletype machine, which could be connected to a mainframe housed elsewhere. Lakeside paid to use the mainframe on a time-share deal alongside numerous other institutions.

Although the computing that could be done within this system was rudimentary to say the least, the experience captured Gates’s imagination instantly. He and a few other pupils set up the Lakeside Programmers’ Club, and before long Gates had written his first chunk of original code – a program to run a game of tic-tac-toe. Never one to let his youth hold him back, Gates was the youngest member of the club but one of its most prominent characters. His refusal to cede time on the teletype machine eventually resulted in him being asked to leave the group, but he was soon back when the others realized he was capable of technical feats that they were not. He agreed to rejoin but, in typical Gates fashion, he insisted it would be

Find Your True Calling

on his terms. He returned as a more dominant figure in the club than the one they had exiled.

Nonetheless, there was still the thorny issue of economics. It cost students about \$8 an hour to use the machine. That would be expensive for your average internet café today but in the late 1960s it was a small fortune for a schoolboy to find. For a while the group received funding from a parents' group, but it was not long before that revenue stream could not keep pace. Meanwhile, Bill's parents were stretching themselves to send him to the school in the first place and were in no position to bankroll his new hobby. So Gates did just what he has done all through his life – he used his initiative. He needed money, so he would find a job.

As chance would have it, the skills he had been developing would get him the position to pay for him to continue honing them. A company called Computer Center Corporation (or C-Cubed) had recently set up business in Seattle. Gates and his fellow Lakesiders struck an innovative deal with them. In return for finding bugs in the nascent company's programs, the students were granted access to C-Cubed's mainframe for free. Obviously, this had to be out of office hours, so Gates and his pals got into a culture of computing late into the night and at weekends. His work for C-Cubed would bring him to the attention of a company working on programs to analyse electricity needs in

How to Think Like Bill Gates

the Columbia Basin. Unaware that Gates was only in the ninth grade at the time, they called him in for an interview, which led to him taking up a valuable work placement in Portland. There he came into contact with a senior programmer called John Norton, who made an enduring impression on Gates, not least for the way in which he pushed the young boy to keep getting better. Gates hardly needed encouraging.

By the time he was fifteen, Gates had progressed far beyond games of tic-tac-toe. He joined forces with a club member a couple of years his senior called Paul Allen, beginning a professional relationship that would see both men reach the upper echelons of the world's rich list. But they started out humbly enough. Their first major venture was to write a program that took Seattle's raw traffic data and converted it into reports that could be used by traffic engineers. They called the program Traf-O-Data and ultimately made in the region of \$20,000 from it. More importantly, they had gained invaluable experience and realized they worked well as a team.

While developing Traf-O-Data, Gates and Allen drafted in a third partner, Paul Gilbert, to work on creating hardware to run the program. It was an enterprise that convinced the two that in fact software was the way forward for them. A little while later, Gates created another program that automated the timetables of the teaching faculty at Lakeside. In

Find Your True Calling

return, he was given increased access to the mainframe that the school used. Gates was letting his expertise work for him and had the good sense to take the opportunity to develop further as his reward.

Gates may well have pondered what lay ahead of him in his Harvard dorm room. We know, for instance, that he flirted with the idea of following his father into law or perhaps becoming a scientist. But it is difficult to believe that there was really much doubt as to which road he would eventually follow.

THE BIRTH OF THE MICROCOMPUTER AGE

'Never trust a computer you can't throw out a window.'

STEVE WOZNIAK

In the late 1960s, modern computing was almost exclusively via mainframe computers – physically vast machines used by governments and businesses for mass data processing. Save for a few enthusiastic hobbyists cobbling together circuit boards in their spare rooms, the idea of individuals using a personal computer for their own ends was but a distant dream.

However, by the early 1970s, new vistas were opening up, thanks in large part to the rapid development of microprocessors. Around this time, Silicon Valley – as the Santa Clara Valley in California came to be